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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R2-ES-2012-N291]

[20124-1113-0000-C2]

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Draft Recovery Plan for the Gulf Coast Jaguarundi

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comment.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announce the availability of our draft recovery plan for the Gulf Coast jaguarundi (*Puma yagouaroundi cacomitli*) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). This species historically occurred in southern Texas in the United States and is currently known to occur in eastern Mexico as far south as Veracruz. We request review and comment on our plan from local, State, and Federal agencies, and the public. We will also accept any new

information on the status of the Gulf Coast jaguarundi throughout its range to assist in finalizing the recovery plan.

DATES: To ensure consideration, we must receive written comments on or before [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. However, we will accept information about any species at any time.

ADDRESSES: If you wish to review the draft recovery plan, you may obtain a copy by visiting our website at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/species/recovery-plans.html>. Alternatively, you may contact the South Texas Refuges Complex Headquarters at 3325 Green Jay Road, Alamo, Texas, or by phone at (956) 784-7500. If you wish to comment on the plan, you may submit your comments in writing by any one of the following methods:

- *U.S. mail:* Mitch Sternberg, at the above address;
- *Hand-delivery:* South Texas Refuges Complex Headquarters at the above address;
- *Fax:* (956) 787-8338; or
- *E-mail:* Mitch_Sternberg@fws.gov

For additional information about submitting comments, see the “Request for Public Comments” section below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mitch Sternberg at the above address, phone number, or e-mail.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Recovery of endangered or threatened animals and plants to the point where they are again secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems is a primary goal of our endangered species program and the Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). Recovery means improvement of the status of listed species to the point at which listing is no longer appropriate under the criteria set out in section 4(a)(1) of the Act. The Act requires the development of recovery plans for listed species, unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species.

Species' History

We listed the Gulf Coast jaguarundi as an endangered species under the Act on June 14, 1976 (41 FR 24062). The Listed Cats of Texas and Arizona Recovery Plan (With Emphasis on the Ocelot), was completed in 1990 and it briefly addressed the jaguar, jaguarundi, and margay, but focused on the ocelot, primarily in Texas. The Draft Gulf Coast Jaguarundi Recovery Plan only applies to the Gulf Coast subspecies of jaguarundi.

The jaguarundi was originally included in the genus *Felis*, and the Gulf Coast jaguarundi was originally listed under the Act as *Felis yagouaroundi cacomitli* in 1976. Later, genus classification was changed from *Felis* to *Herpailurus*, and this widely accepted change was subsequently made to the listing. Thus, this subspecies is currently listed under the Act as *Herpailurus* (= *Felis*) *yagouaroundi cacomitli*. However, more

recent genetic work assigns the jaguarundi to the genus *Puma*, and this has become the generally accepted nomenclature. Therefore, in keeping with this current information, we refer to the Gulf Coast jaguarundi subspecies as *Puma yagouaroundi cacomitili* throughout this recovery plan, and we officially accept the new scientific name of the jaguarundi as *Puma yagouaroundi*.

The Sinaloan jaguarundi (*Puma yagouaroundi tolteca*) was originally listed under the Act at the same time as the Gulf Coast subspecies. Because all of the current information indicates that the *tolteca* subspecies occurs entirely outside the United States and has never been confirmed within the United States, the Sinaloan jaguarundi was exempted from recovery planning on June 7, 2011.

The Gulf Coast jaguarundi is found in the Tamaulipan Biotic Province of northeast Mexico and south Texas. Within Mexico it occurs in the eastern lowlands and has not been recorded in the Central Highlands. In southern Texas, jaguarundis used dense thorny shrublands. Jaguarundis will use bunchgrass pastures if dense brush or woody cover is nearby.

The primary known threats to the Gulf Coast jaguarundi are habitat destruction, degradation, and fragmentation associated with agriculture and urbanization, and, to some extent, border security activities. Mortality from collisions with vehicles is also a threat.

Recovery Plan Goals

The objective of an agency recovery plan is to provide a framework for the recovery of a species so that protection under the Act is no longer necessary. A recovery

plan includes scientific information about the species and provides criteria and actions necessary for us to be able to reclassify the species to threatened status or remove it from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants (List). Recovery plans help guide our recovery efforts by describing actions we consider necessary for the species' conservation, and by estimating time and costs for implementing needed recovery measures. To achieve its goals, this draft recovery plan identifies the following objectives:

- Support efforts to develop more effective survey techniques for jaguarundis and to ascertain the status, better understand ecological and conservation needs, and promote conservation of the Gulf Coast jaguarundi and its habitats.
- Assess, protect, and restore sufficient habitat and connectivity to support viable populations and genetic exchange of the Gulf Coast jaguarundi in southern Texas and in Mexico.
- Reduce the effects of human population growth and development on potential Gulf Coast jaguarundi habitat in the United States and on the jaguarundi's potential survival and mortality.
- Assure the long-term viability of jaguarundi conservation through partnerships, the development and application of incentives for landowners, application of existing regulations, and public education and outreach.
- Practice adaptive management in which recovery is monitored and recovery tasks are revised by the FWS as new information becomes available.

The draft revised recovery plan contains recovery criteria based on maintaining and increasing population numbers and habitat quality and quantity. The revised recovery

plan focuses on protecting populations, managing threats, maintaining habitat, monitoring progress, and building partnerships to facilitate recovery.

As the subspecies meets recovery criteria, we will review the subspecies' status and consider removal from the List.

Request for Public Comments

Section 4(f) of the Act requires us to provide public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment during recovery plan development. It is also our policy to request peer review of recovery plans (July 1, 1994; 59 FR 34270). In an appendix to the approved recovery plan, we will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the public and peer reviewers. Substantive comments may or may not result in changes to the recovery plan; comments regarding recovery plan implementation will be forwarded as appropriate to Federal or other entities so that they can be taken into account during the course of implementing recovery actions. Responses to individual commenters will not be provided, but we will provide a summary of how we addressed substantive comments in an appendix to the approved recovery plan.

We invite written comments on the draft recovery plan. This plan incorporates the most recent scientific research specific to the Gulf Coast jaguarundi. In particular, we are interested in information regarding the current threats to the species and the costs associated with implementing the recommended recovery actions.

Before we approve the plan, we will consider all comments we receive by the date specified in DATES above. Methods of submitting comments are in the ADDRESSES section above.

Public Availability of Comments

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Comments and materials we receive will be available, by appointment, for public inspection during normal business hours at our office (see ADDRESSES).

Authority

We developed our draft recovery plan and publish this notice under the authority of section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

Dated: December 10, 2012.

Benjamin Tuggle,
Regional Director,
Southwest Region.

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